



MOBILE
VS
MODULAR
HOMES



DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE?

From time to time, the State of Maine Manufactured Housing Board receives questions regarding the listing and selling of used double-wide and modular homes. The problem appears to be the difficulty of determining if the home is a mobile (federal certified) or modular home (state certified).

Mobile homes built since June 15, 1976, must conform to the National Manufactured Home Construction and Safety Standards established under a law passed by the U.S. Congress. The standards are administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Mobile homes are the only homes with a national building code. Every home has a red and silver seal certifying that it was built in compliance with the federal code. These homes are the only homes that are “manufactured homes” as defined by HUD since June 15, 1976. “Mobile homes” are synonymous with “manufactured homes” with regard to the industry’s use of these terms.

A modular home sold or installed in the State of Maine is built to standards approved by the Maine Manufactured Housing Board. Currently those standards are the BOCA National Building Code, as adopted by the Building Officials and Code Administrators, Inc.; the BOCA Plumbing Code; NFPA 70, National Electrical Code; and NFPA 31, Installation of Oil Burning Equipment. Effective May 4, 2005, the standards approved by the Maine Manufactured Housing Board will be the 2003 International Residential Code (IRC) with exceptions; NFPA 31, Standard for the Installation of Oil Burning Equipment; NFPA 54-2002, National Fuel Gas Code; NFPA 58, Liquefied Petroleum Gas Code; NFPA 70, National Electrical Code, with exceptions; NFPA 211, Standard for Chimneys, Fireplaces, Vents and Solid Fuel Burning Appliances; 2003 International Plumbing Code, and Oil and Solid Fuel Board Rules with exceptions. Modular homes are the only homes with a state code. Title 30-A, §4358(2)(E) states that modular homes must be allowed in all zones where other single-family homes are allowed.


For anyone selling homes, it is of paramount importance to determine the standard the home is certified as meeting, more for customer satisfaction rather than a safety issue. Certainly any appraisal of the home would need to identify the method of construction to determine a fair value. The reason being is that the mobile home (HUD) code, before mid-1994, did not require sheathing board between the siding and the exterior wall studs. We encouraged most dealers to order homes with at least a fome-core sheathing, which is a ¼ inch layered cardboard and styrofoam. This does not provide any greater insulation factor or additional strength, but provides an air infiltration barrier. Since mid-1994 mobile homes installed in Wind Zone II (Washington and Hancock counties) are required to use steel strapping, or a combination of steel strapping and structural rated wall sheathing, for securing the exterior wall framing to the roof and floor systems (OSB has been commonly used). Some homes, including recently built homes, are sheathed with “Celotex,” a building board that has a small degree of insulating value. You still find homes without any sheathing from time to time; and it would be recommended that with any home a real estate agent sells, the seller should identify if it has a sheathing board or not, and if it does, the type of material used for sheathing. Also, it should be pointed out that Title 30-A, §4358(2) requires that municipalities allow mobile homes on undeveloped individual house lots in a number of locations where single-family dwellings are allowed.

The major difference between a modular home and a mobile home is the fact that a mobile home is built on a permanent chassis (However, some modular homes are built with a steel floor support system, so you might need to rely on other means to distinguish between HUD and modular). This means that a mobile home is installed with two I-beams (main rails) for single-wide homes and four I-beams in double-wide homes, used to absorb the weight of the home and transfer that to the ground. While some manufacturers use eight or ten inch floor joists to transfer bearing weight of the exterior walls to the I-beams, many manufacturers use six inch floor joists and transfer that weight by metal outriggers. These are pie shaped pieces of metal welded to the I-beam, usually every four or eight feet, and extending out to the outside rail (exterior wall). A Federal Court order in late 1989 forbids any HUD certified home from being installed without its chassis without individual approval by HUD. Since that court order, there has not been a home approved by HUD in the State of Maine for installation with the chassis removed. I might point out that the chassis does not include the hitch or wheels.

May I describe how you identify the differences when you are inspecting the home for your data sheet? As previously mentioned, all HUD mobile homes are required to have a red and silver seal. On a single-wide home the seal is located on the rear of the home approximately where a license plate may appear. On the double-wide home, once the home has been installed, each unit has one seal installed on the front and one on the back of the home. They are not placed on the transporting end of the home because the siding on the transporting end is installed at the site. Additionally, all mobile homes are required to have a data sheet installed within the home. On the more expensive homes they are placed, if it has one, on the inside of the wood door to the electrical panel box. If not located there, they are found in the master closet, or a kitchen cabinet, or sometimes in the closets where the washer and dryer are located. The data sheets give information as to the date of manufacture, roof load, appliances that came with the home, etc.

You may notice I refer to multi-unit mobile homes as a double-wide. This is very common in the industry and if a home owner describes the home as a double-wide, it should be presumed to be a multi-wide mobile home until identified otherwise.

Modular homes built prior to 1973 cannot be verified because there was no requirement for a seal. Modular homes produced since 1973 will have a State of Maine Seal of Approval and this seal is usually found under the kitchen sink. If not under the kitchen sink, they are found in a kitchen cabinet. This was the approximate date that the Maine State Housing Authority approved modular homes for sale in the State. In late 1977, the program was transferred to the Manufactured Housing Board.

This SEAL remains the property of THE STATE OF MAINE MANUFACTURED HOUSING BOARD		
		
This seal certifies compliance with the Regulations for the State Certification of Manufactured Housing. Manufacturer certifies to compliance.		
LIC #	OP	D
MSN	DSN 14768	IA

Maine State Seal of Approval



HUD Data Plate